

Which Way Religious Life?

An Interview with Father David Reid, SS.CC.

January 2021

By Father David Lupo, SS.CC.
Pastor, St. Mary Parish, Fairhaven

" Religious life ought to promote growth in the church by way of attraction. The church must be attractive. Wake up the world! Be witnesses of a different way of doing things, of acting, of living! . . . It is this witness that I expect of you. Religious should be men and women who are able to wake the world up."



When I entered the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts, novices did not take new names when they made their profession of vows. So my name David Patrick is how I was named the day I was baptized back in 1942, two days after birth, no doubt on the way home from the hospital. I was the fifth of seven children born to Alex and Elizabeth Reid. Although there was rationing and some bombing, Dublin where I grew up was spared in the time of the Second World War. Life was frugal, family and church centered and schooling was done by the Sisters of Mercy and the Irish Christian Brothers. Almost every Friday another priest or brother came from a religious order to speak about vocations. I chose the SSCC because both my brother and cousin were already students there. We had the practice of Night Adoration in the Home, a way of family prayer promoted by the SSCC and this made a great impression on me. When I entered in 1959 my novice master gave us many instructions on the practice, where it came from and how a life of reparative prayer could change the world.

After a year of novitiate in Ireland, I headed to seminary life in New Hampshire. For a city kid, this was more country after a year of it in the Irish midlands. There were 100 students in the seminary and we had a set way of doing things. I went to Catholic University in DC to begin theology but finished off back in New Hampshire due to a change in educational policy. However, my interest in theology was awakened and particularly in biblical studies. With final vows in 1963 and ordination in 1966, I headed back to Catholic University and then onto the Biblical Institute in Rome. The experience at Catholic University during the first year of Vatican II and then later life in Rome during the time of Paul VI were rich experiences. Learned a bit and saw a lot. Studies over, I went to Washington DC where I taught Scripture for eighteen years at the Washington Theological Union. I did get a leave to return to Rome and complete a doctorate in biblical theology. What can I say? Well you really do not know a subject until you have to teach it and my students taught me a lot. I was always pastorally engaged and particularly in offering Adult Education classes in parishes. I loved directing retreats.

Fast forward to a discernment that I needed to experience more of pastoral life. So I left academia and headed into the life of inner city pastoral work in Rochester NY. Reparative love in action and coming to know the ups and downs of both diocesan and parish life. After eight years there, an

assignment brought me to the Fall River diocese but not for long before I was elected Provincial to serve for six years. Major changes were afoot in religious life and the Province was itself international and intercultural. In fact, when I ended as Provincial I served in India for four years before I failed to receive a return visa. Back in the USA, I served in a parish in Maryland and then finally I went to Rome as a Postulator General which means I was involved in presenting causes to the Vatican for canonization. Now I think I am retired but it seems only semi and I want it that way. Throughout all this time, my desire to be part of the repair of the world has never left me and I feel blessed to feel even more enthusiastic about my vocation today than when I began. I am a bit of a scavenger but now I believe God is even more of a scavenger when I think of what God works with in me.

Question 1. "How can Religious Life be more attractive today?"

Religious Life can be more attractive today if the life can be seen for what it is. It is one way to live the Gospel of Jesus as that one way is illustrated in the life and mission of a Congregation's respective founder or foundress. John the Evangelist says that all the books in the world could not tell the story of Jesus. There are many ways to celebrate the story of our redemption. Every baptized person is involved in the telling. Some are called to follow a particular way that is for them bold and attractive, compelling and beautiful. So to make religious life attractive? Constantly chip away. What do I mean? In a piece of marble Michelangelo saw the Pieta and he chipped away to allow the beauty to be revealed. In religious life, we see the image of Jesus and chip away the individual and institutional things that build up over time to hide the beauty and make it more difficult to hear and heed the call to holiness. Within the Church, religious life needs always to be pruned and reformed.

Question 2. Can everyone agree on what that Michelangelo looks like, that thing of beauty in which we all share?

Yes, and no. No, not everyone will see the beauty that the artist saw. But one who knows beauty will rejoice that Michelangelo saw it that way. People would no longer travel hundreds of miles to see the Pieta if it did not make them feel better about being human. As does a red ladybird upon a stalk (Patrick Pearse). Pope Francis says that the way of beauty is how we will evangelize the world. Just as teaching needs to be rooted in witness, doctrine needs to be rooted in the beauty of Liturgy. Beauty is to art what holiness is to religion. Francis' way of beauty, as Augustine's before him, is assured because we as humans are made for beauty just as we are called to holiness. Religious life is a call to holiness and it is a call to beauty and all the dimensions of beauty: trusting the more that there is to life, the experience of goodness, rejoicing in the truth, the joy of harmony. We believe as Christians that we are made for the beauty of Christ and religious life is a call to explore the Gospel beauty of Jesus Christ in a community life of service.

Question 3. I don't know much about art--and some of the stuff I've seen at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington DC caused me to laugh--but more people would be attracted to Michelangelo's David, or DaVinci's Mona Lisa than to something by Paul Jackson Pollack. The abstract doesn't attract as much, to me. I look to see the human in the Beautiful. So I look for the beautiful and human in Religious Life. Is that what you're saying?

A. You are correct Jackson Pollack is not everyone's cup of tea. In knowing that you have already learned about yourself, your tastes, your affinities, your likes. You were born for beauty. I listen for the spontaneous response: "oh! Beautiful!" We hear it all day long. "Mrs. Brown, I'll bring you the veggies tomorrow," and the response "Oh Jack that's beautiful." It fits in, it is harmonious, there's a plan somewhere and it will all work out. The Psalmist knew of this beauty when the community sang of order,

chaos and then new order. Give praise to God on the cusp of new order. So many psalms speak of rescue, deliverance, salvation, new beginnings. The allure of the worshipping community always set a new high. The hope of being again God's community of praise drew brothers and sisters together: "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! "(Ps.133) A song of ascent, as the community hails Jerusalem, "for there the Lord ordained his blessing, life forevermore." In the history of the Church these words spoke to the attractiveness of religious life, a symbol for all the church, a foretaste of the hope of our glory to which we are called in a holiness of life." (cf. Romans 5:2; Colossians 1:27)

Question 4. Indeed, how wonderful it is when brothers, or sisters dwell in unity, re-quoting Psalm 133. Common life is a thing of beauty, a joy forever. Yet, it seems our American attraction to individualism and freedom work against the masterpiece coming about. Do you agree?

A. Religious life (RL) is within the Church and the Church within the Gospel. As an alternate form of living the Gospel ever since the early days of martyrdom, RL is the total gift of self. Irresistibly attractive! No wonder that the way we speak of RL takes its cue from marriage. In fact, a recent religious profession from the Trappistines in Wrentham, Ma written up in the Pilot (Boston) evidenced nuptial themes of self-gift in love. Yes! your question makes great sense. Religious life is inculturation, the individual gives himself or herself to the service of God in and through the community. A new way of being in the world and with others: that's culture. Religious life upholds the individual; we are each uniquely and beautifully made and yet we are not our own. We belong to others. We belong to Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:19) The Social Teaching of the Church upholds both the individual and the community and the Church presents RL as a lesson in humanity when so many religious orders and congregations are intercultural, intergenerational and international. This is freedom! The capacity to do what is good. The question that undergirds all commitment: is this what you freely want to do? No one answers that question without first making what is called the Novitiate, a time of intense preparation to free the heart to answer Yes! Imagine the Church as intensely preparing people for the sacrament of marriage as brothers and sisters are prepared for religious profession! Music only comes to the trained hand.

Question 5. The individual for Christ, not self; Freedom for Christ, not self. These, lived intensely, could wake up many, using the term from Pope Francis. For that to be visible from the outside, it must be valued on the inside the religious community. How might we become more inspired, become awakened ourselves?

A. Your question is a wake-up call and it recalls the words of Ephesians 5:14 "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." The wake-up call is the call of beauty; note that the word for beauty in Greek "*kalos*" is close to the verb to call "*kalein*." And of course that means imagination. And there is no forward movement in human life without imagination, imaging where we are going together ... to God in whose plural image we are made (Genesis 1:26). Think of the restoration of the Sistine Chapel in recent years and the imagination that both swept the artist and sweeps the viewer today. It is high time to unloose. Oh for the beauty of the Lazarus story! (John 11: 9-16). From work I did when in Rome I became convinced that men and women religious of various orders and congregations in mission together on the peripheries (e.g. communities of support to immigrants), radically sustained in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the Word, is the call to beauty that will awaken us. Religious communities are too closed up in their own story and inadequately catholic in not sharing their granaries of charismatic gifts for the world. May we not hoard the gifts of God. St. Paul pleaded with the Corinthians to share, not bottle up. There is hope in the many secular branches, associations and other attempts by the People of God to declericalize the religious life and let loose the life of the Spirit. But are we too zoned for comfort to stand with others in a martyrdom of charity? The title of a 2017 Vatican document devoted to the renewal of RL could be roughly translated *Fresh Skins for New Wine*.

Question 6. There has been much discussion on re-imagining religious life. Do you believe that the de-clericalization of religious life may awaken us to realize our "first love"?

Interesting that you mention "first love." I found myself rereading the Song of Songs when reflecting on these questions. The attraction, excitement of feeling I wanted to join RL and then the sense of unworthiness. Was I crazy to think that I might fit in? Religious are so set apart. And that was the uppermost thought before Vatican II: set apart, cut off, isolated. The reality was that religious were part of everything but the ethos was clerical in the biblical sense of God's lot. Still a truly valuable understanding but not the whole picture and not helpful when it becomes a vision of a small portion that calls all the shots. The rules for such a small portion became the rules for all. And then the rule of a small portion was how even the word "church" was popularly understood. Fifty years after Vatican II we are still working out an alternative. Enter Pope Francis who with his understanding of communal discernment and the church as synod has offered a new vision. We are a pilgrim people on the road together. We are to become synodal, yes "on the road together" in every which way. We are led in the Spirit and we have to learn a whole new way of listening to God together. RL is no exception and all the practices which were set up for such synodal living have to be redone. General chapters, provincial chapters, all meetings of the community have to be synodal, open, discerning and prayerful. There can be no cult of personality when it comes to founders or leaders and no abuse of authority as individual fiefdoms. The power of the Spirit, gift of the Risen Lord is given to all and together we will discern the movements of that Spirit. No monopolies, no caste and no exclusion. The ministerial priesthood will shine all the more brightly if it can be likewise liberated from clericalism as Pope Francis has consistently maintained and the mission through Baptism to be missionary body of Christ the priest for the world will be more firmly grasped by all the baptized. What did Augustine say about that first love?

Question 7. You were connecting "first love" with the Song of Songs and St. Augustine, and I was thinking of John the Revelator's Letter to the Church at Ephesus! You wish to erase boundaries--if I hear you correctly--between laity and religious life. Marks of distinction have become walls, and do not further the mission. Can we instead keep the habit, and the priest, his clerics, and work on the attitudes that have accompanied these marks of distinction?

A. With a Superior General who rides his bike around Rome even on official trips, some walls are already down; for others, the outer habit is a sign of service and the wearers want to remain servants all their lives. Some use the marks as ways to benefit themselves. It is soon apparent with them that the habit does not make the monk. At events in St. Peter's with the Holy Father, I have known priests who concelebrated in order to have a seat to the exclusion of sisters who make up the majority of such a gathering. But who hasn't known impeccably attired priests who were 100% service? In today's world of heightened communication, clothes are constantly a statement for better for worse. The right way to go is to accept each one's discernment, provided all address the issue that you raise: attitudes.

Can you identify a person's spirit from how they dress? Depending on the situation, inappropriate attire could indicate a lack of respect for the other person. The day I co-presided with the Pope at St. Martha's I wore dress shoes. When I served at St. Peter's Kitchen run by the Missionaries of Charity, I wore sneakers; the Sisters wore their regular garb; it is who they are, not what they do.

The sheer variety of how we dress celebrates the catholic character of our faith. With that remark there is much on which to reflect. There are millions of Christians whose lives are moved by their faith convictions but they travel in unmarked vehicles. You know them by their love. We have a flood of witnesses but we need a groundswell of sharing with each other of what it means to be clothed in Jesus Christ. Ideally such sharing should be part of our communal gatherings. In the early church Christians met

and shared life and then, before returning home, they celebrated Eucharist (testimony of St. Justin Martyr). We come to celebrate Eucharist with no community sharing. It is not that we put the cart before the horse, we have no horse. No real community. How many have been to Mass alongside each other for years without knowing names, lives, witnesses? Community is the garb that we need to wear, genuine community of life shared, griefs commonly borne, challenges addressed, marriages and funerals celebrated as a community. Let RL be lived and shared in the midst of parish life. One archbishop in India asked that there be no convent masses on a Sunday morning. Vocation to RL is authenticated when all are called and feel that way about what they are doing. There are no uncalled Christians. Put on Christ! (See Galatians 3:27) The garb of community is a recognition of the variety of gifts to be the one living Body of Christ, such as we pray to become in the second epiclesis at Eucharist. When I worked in a soup kitchen a retreat leader told us that a poor man may forget what he ate on a given day but he will never forget how he was served. In community, a brother or sister may forget how they were garbed for a given event but never forget how well they were received for all community is giving and receiving ... each other. (See Phil 4:15.) Amen.

Question 8. That retreat director's remark reminded me of something similar Maya Angelou said, basically that people may forget what you said or did, but they won't forget how you made them feel. And that might touch what you said about Eucharist without communal celebration. Yet, we ordained get caught in that trap. How is it that the Eucharist has become so stultified?

A. Stultified is a big word but challenging. It is given as the antonym to stimulate and we might say attractive which is the word with which we began this discussion. What is stimulating, attractive about celebrating the Eucharist? I go immediate to a concern that has struck me for years and I will say how I have tried to resolve it. The concern is that the ritual of the Mass as we have it now is tightly woven and concentrated. There are so many layers of meaning to the celebration. There is hardly a word spoken in the Eucharistic prayer that does not have a biblical root. Likewise, no gesture is without a pedigree. Why even the gesture of Table fellowship is rooted not only in the ministry of Jesus but Jesus knowingly was rooting everything in the story of God's covenant with Israel. To have some way of recalling this thick, multi-layered way of entering into the Eucharistic action would be wonderful. Much was written about the greeting at the beginning of Mass. The Lord be with you and with your spirit! Pause. This greeting tells us who God sees as we approach the sacred gathering. Paul says the Holy Spirit testifies to our spirit that we are the sons and daughters of God. Pause. Who am I that the Holy Spirit should stand up for me at the beginning of this Mass? Don't run away, stand your ground. Let the Spirit engulf you. God wants you here. Surrender, give in and respond "and with your spirit." Tears. I am shaking. This is to say that the attractiveness of the Mass is lost or won in the very first greeting. There is no moment in the life of the presider more important to let go of himself than when he calls the community to worship. Mass does not have to do with "Father." Mass has to do with Jesus in his relationship with his Father. We enter that sacred space in the Spirit.

Question 9. What's beautiful and therefore attractive then about the Mass is both external and internal?

A. Yes, and it is the internal meaning of what we are doing that invites attention to the external beauty. There is a long history to every action of the Eucharist celebration, rich, diverse and loaded with meaning. Vatican II made some great breakthroughs because the theme of the Council was 1) back to the sources and 2) renewal for a new day. A constant concern for me is the offertory procession which had suffered immensely over the course of centuries to the point of its habitual exclusion. What a shift happened when the community back then in the Middle Ages no longer brought the bread and wine for the Eucharist. The barter of the market no longer touched the relationship with God when the people brought the substance of their lives to exchange for the substance of God's life, God's beloved son. Mass became an affair of the

sacristy. And a foreign language ruled the day. Mass was done for you, not an action in which we participate. But making one's offering is crucial to the sense of worship. God who sees the intentions of our hearts accepts that offering. God's acceptance is called sacrifice, meaning that only God makes sacrifice, that is makes holy, brings the community into access of God's presence. So the movement is offering, the calling down of the Holy Spirit and communion. All this making real the Word of God, in the narrative of the Last supper, is set within the proclamation of the Good News, so-called Liturgy of the Word. There was a century of intense liturgical studies which prepared for Vatican II's document on the Liturgy. Vatican II also reminded us that looking to how Eucharist is celebrated in other Christian churches helps to see more clearly the significance of words, gestures, customs. For instance, the ritual of putting heated water into the cup of consecrated wine in the Byzantine rite as a reminder that the Holy Spirit is the gift of the risen Lord. And of course that leads to an understanding that the encounter with the Risen Lord in Eucharist is Trinitarian. Thus it is within the final doxology of the Eucharistic prayer that we commune with the Risen Lord: through him and with him and in him in the unity of the Holy Spirit all glory and honor is yours almighty Father forever and ever AMEN!!!!

Question 10. Well, it sounds like all is going quite well for Religious Life. As you enter retirement after 60 years of Religious Profession, what are you finding? What are the issues in retirement? Should I develop an avocation, and focus solely my prayer life I before I get there?

A. Retirement, the word sounds so final and so I think that I am semi-retired. As we say "I can still help out." In biblical theology we say the end time is like the beginning time and so it is with community life, formation and retirement are alike. Between the two an active religious is always juggling pastoral life and community life; in retirement there is nothing but communal life but then the cast of characters is different, each with a lifetime to cherish. Prayer takes over and that's a great blessing. Unless we are Pelagians, we realize that all was prayer from day one, not our prayer but participation in Jesus' prayer for the world; we were blessed to be body talk of that ever-being-prayed prayer. I repent the many times I forgot that one simple truth. Of course, health is a big concern and for me, adrenal insufficiency is a daily but not an insurmountable challenge. I loved my life, blessed from the git-go. And every day that God puts out the sun, it is a fresh start. I have a brother and two sisters in Ireland and we are in good contact. The Congregation has asked me to help put in the Apostolate of the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in the Home. And the best spiritual direction I have received is that my study is in service of prayer. I study to pray. Yes, I plan on publishing more of my homily insights but the primary goal of my biblical study is that I might enter less unprepared into the perpetual prayer of adoration which bounds the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For that to happen, we take our cue from Mary's turning things over in her heart. (Luke 2,19,51)

Question 11. Hmm, thank you very much, and we hope you stay well. Is there anything you are presently reading that you find worthwhile?

A. Of course a lot of my time (four hours to research 700 words!) is spent on my Lectionary studies. Little shows up on the page but I need the security of knowing the basis on which I make comments and of course references have to be accurate. So there are always commentaries and dictionaries to be checked out. Beyond that I am reading an old one *Redemptive Suffering* by William J. O'Malley (1997) and also rereading *The Name of Jesus* by Irene Hausherr (1978). I have begun reading *Fratelli* by Pope Francis (2020), quite an undertaking. I have requested *How to be an Anti Racist* by Ibram Kendi (2019) from our local library and my brother Alex in Ireland insists that I stick my nose into *Thinking Nature and the Nature of Thinking* by Willemien Otten (2020). All, I trust, worthwhile. Thank you for this chance to share.